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SECURE LOCKBOX

Field of Invention

The invention lockboxes for use in real estate sales and related transactions. More particularly, the invention relates to lockboxes designed to prevent unintended changing of the lockbox combination.

Background of the Invention

Lockboxes are commonly used in the real estate sales industry to provide means for a large number of salesmen to gain access to a locked building. The lockbox is secured to the building and contains a key fitting a lock controlling access to the building. The lockbox key repository is typically secured with a combination lock. The combination for this lock is usually distributed to the real estate community so as to provide limited access to the building. In most lockboxes, once the correct combination has been entered and the repository opened, the lockbox may be removed from the attachment to the building. Further, with the repository open, the combination may also be changed. This sometimes leads to problems. A dishonest agent could open the repository and then change the combination so that only he has access, shutting out other agents. Further, an agent could open the repository and then remove the lockbox altogether, again shutting out other agents.

A number of lockbox designs have been developed. U.S. Patent No. 5,815,557 issued to Larson discloses a secure entry system that makes use of radio transmissions to communicate with locks, keys, and related components throughout the system. The radio

transmissions can be made using a paging system, a cellular telephone system, or any other RF carrier. Some embodiments employ a cellular telephone in lieu of an electronic key. Others integrate a paging receiver within an electronic key to provide a unit with dual functionality. The system is illustrated with reference to exemplary applications in the industrial site security, real estate lockbox, and transportation fields. A homeowner key allows the homeowner greater oversight and involvement. The key includes a privacy feature, enabling the homeowner to disable the lockbox for a predetermined period if privacy is desired.

U.S. Patent No. 5,705,991 issued to Kniffin, et al. describes a secure entry system that makes use of radio transmissions to communicate with locks, keys, and related components throughout the system. The radio transmissions can be made using a paging system, a cellular telephone system, or any other RF carrier. Some embodiments employ a cellular telephone in lieu of an electronic key. Others integrate a paging receiver within an electronic key to provide a unit with dual functionality. The system is illustrated with reference to exemplary applications in the industrial site security, real estate lockbox, and transportation fields.

U.S. Patent No. 5,245,652 issued to Larson, et al. discloses a comprehensive real estate lockbox system which provides a variety of operational features. One of these includes a reader key that can retrieve access data from a system lockbox. The reader key is provided with an audible tone generator which can be selectively enabled by the user. The tone generator can be used to download data from the reader key over telephone lines.

U.S. Patent No. 5,084,945 issued to *Childers* describes a detent clip adapted to fit around the edge of a door and positioned so that the clip prevents the swinging movement of a real estate lockbox attached to the handle of the door. The clip comprises a substantially U-

shaped member, one leg of which has a projecting portion to bear against the lockbox thereby deterring its swinging movement when the door is opened or closed.

U.S. Patent No. 5,046,084 issued to *Barrett, et al.* describes an electronic real estate lockbox system that includes a facsimile reporting capability. More particularly, numeric data detailing the location of a lockbox, dates and times of accesses to the lockbox, and the identities of the keyholders who accessed the lockbox, is transferred from the lockbox to a central computer. The central computer interprets this numeric data to provide human-readable names, addresses, etc. After translation, the central computer formats the data for facsimile transmission to the local real estate offices that require the information to track usage of the lockbox.

U.S. Patent No. 4,766,746 issued to *Henderson, et al.* discloses a comprehensive real estate lockbox system which provides a variety of operational features. Some of these features include the ability to: record all accesses to all lockboxes; transfer all or part of such records from the lockboxes to a supervising real estate agency or board; organize and review such records; facilitate operation of lockboxes that are mounted in awkward or poorly lit locations; limit lockbox accesses to preselected agents, agencies or boards; reprogram lockboxes in the field; monitor redundantly the status of the lockbox battery; record diagnostic information on each operation of a lockbox or key; render keys inoperative on predetermined dates; disable unauthorized keys; grant agents from remote real estate boards permission to open certain lockboxes, and; grant different keys different privileges.

U.S. Patent No. 4,727,368 issued to *Larson, et al.* describes real estate lockbox and key designs which provide a variety of operational features. Also disclosed is a comprehensive system that allows real estate boards and agencies to efficiently manage their

lockbox operations. Features provided by the system include the ability to record all accesses to all lockboxes; transfer all or part of such records from the lockboxes to the real estate agency or board; organize and review such records at the agency or board offices; disable operation of various lockboxes during certain hours of the day; facilitate operation of lockboxes that are mounted in awkward or poorly lit locations; limit lockbox accesses to pre-selected agents, agencies or boards; and record diagnostic information with each operation of a lockbox or key.

It is an objective of the present invention to provide a lockbox for use in the real estate sales industry that is secure from unauthorized removal. It is a further objective to provide a lockbox that has an interior key-retaining chamber that is secured by a combination lock. It is a still further objective of the invention to means to control access to the setting of the combination for the lockbox. It is a final objective to provide a lockbox that may be easily used, is rugged and reliable and that may be inexpensively manufactured and maintained.

While some of the objectives of the present invention are disclosed in the prior art, none of the inventions found include all of the requirements identified.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention addresses all of the deficiencies of prior art weighing and counting inventions and satisfies all of the objectives described above.

(1) A secure lockbox providing the desired features may be constructed from the following components. A body is provided. The body has a top surface, a side surface, an attachment bail and an interior cavity, the interior cavity extends inwardly from an opening in the side surface. The attachment bail extends upwardly from the top surface of the body and

is slidable from a first, open position to a second, closed position in which the lockbox is secured to a building fixture.

A first key lock is provided. The first key lock is located within the interior cavity and secures the bail in the second, closed position. A door is provided. The door is sized and shaped to be removably secured to the opening. A combination lock is provided. The combination lock is fitted to the door, controls access to the interior cavity through the opening, and has a combination that is changed through access to a rear panel of the door. A second key lock is provided. The second key lock controls access to the combination lock. When the attachment bail is in the first open position it is attached to the building fixture and slid into the second, closed position and then locked in the second, closed position with the first key lock. The combination of the combination lock is then set and secured with the second key lock. A building key is then inserted in the interior cavity and the door secured to the opening with the combination lock, thereby permitting access to a building to only those who have been given the combination and preventing changes to the combination and removal of the lockbox.

(2) In a variant of the invention, the body has a top surface, a side surface, an attachment bail and an interior cavity, the interior cavity extends inwardly from an opening in the side surface. The attachment bail extends upwardly from the top surface of the body and is slidable from a first, open position to a second, closed position in which the lockbox is secured to a building fixture. A first combination lock is provided. The first combination lock is located upon the top surface and secures the bail in the second, closed position. A door is provided. The door is sized and shaped to be removably secured to the opening. A second combination lock is provided. The second combination lock is fitted to the door, controls

access to the interior cavity through the opening, and has a combination that is changed through access to a rear panel of the door. A key lock is provided. The key lock controls access to the second combination lock. When the attachment bail is in the first open position it is attached to the building fixture and slid into the second, closed position and then locked in the second, closed position with the first combination lock. The combination of the second combination lock is then set and secured with the key lock. A building key is then inserted in the interior cavity and the door secured to the opening with the second combination lock, thereby permitting access to a building to only those who have been given the combination and preventing changes to the combination and removal of the lockbox.

(3) In yet another variant, a resilient covering for the body is provided. The covering is located over the side surfaces of the body to prevent damage to buildings.

(4) In still another variant, a resilient sleeve for the attachment bail is provided. The sleeve prevents damage to building fixtures.

(5) In a further variant, the first key lock and the second key lock are identically keyed.

(6) In still a further variant, a weatherproof cover is provided. The weatherproof cover is removably secured over the first combination lock.

(7) In another variant of the invention, a chain is provided. The chain attaches the door to the body.

(8) In still another variant, a protruding ledge is provided. The protruding ledge extends outwardly from an edge of the door and is sized and shaped to fit pivotally into an edge of the opening. A sliding latch is provided. The sliding latch is sized, shaped and disposed to removably engage an edge of the opening, and is slidable from a first, disengaged

position to a second engaged position for securing the door to the opening. The latch is releasably locked in the engaged position by the combination lock.

(9) In yet another variation, a protruding ledge is provided. The protruding ledge extends from an edge of the door and is sized and shaped to fit pivotally into an edge of the opening. A sliding latch is provided. The sliding latch is sized, shaped and disposed to removably engage an edge of the opening, and is slidable from a first, disengaged position to a second engaged position for securing the door to the opening. The latch is releasably locked in the engaged position by the second combination lock.

(10) In a further variant, the sliding latch includes a non-slip surface.

(11) In a final variant of the invention, the sliding latch includes a protrusion extending outwardly from the door.

An appreciation of the other aims and objectives of the present invention and an understanding of it may be achieved by referring to the accompanying drawings and the detailed description of a preferred embodiment.

Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a first embodiment of the invention including a key operated lock for securing the attachment bail;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the **Figure 1** embodiment illustrating the lockbox door in the open position and attachment chain;

Figure 3 a perspective view of a second embodiment of the invention including a combination lock for securing the attachment bail; and

Figure 4 is a perspective view of the **Figure 3** embodiment illustrating the lockbox door in the open position and attachment chain.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

(1) **Figures 1-2** illustrate a secure lockbox **10** providing the desired features that may be constructed from the following components. A body **15** is provided. The body **15** has a top surface **20**, a side surface **25**, an attachment bail **30** and an interior cavity **35**, the interior cavity **35** extends inwardly from an opening **40** in the side surface **25**. The attachment bail **30** extends upwardly from the top surface **20** of the body **15** and is slidable from a first, open position **45** to a second, closed position **50** in which the lockbox **10** is secured to a building fixture (not shown).

A first key lock **60** is provided. The first key lock **60** is located within the interior cavity **35** and secures the bail **30** in the second, closed position **50**. A door **65** is provided. The door **65** is sized and shaped to be removably secured to the opening **40**. A combination lock **70** is provided. The combination lock **70** is fitted to the door **65**, controls access to the interior cavity **35** through the opening **40**, and has a combination **75** that is changed through access to a rear panel **80** of the door **65**. A second key lock **85** is provided. The second key lock **85** controls access to the combination lock **70**. When the attachment bail **30** is in the first open position **45** it is attached to the building fixture **55** and slid into the second, closed position **50** and then locked in the second, closed position **50** with the first key lock **60**. The combination **75** of the combination lock **70** is then set and secured with the second key lock **85**. A building key **90** is then inserted in the interior cavity **35** and the door **65** secured to the opening **40** with the combination lock **70**, thereby permitting access to a building (not shown)

to only those who have been given the combination **75** and preventing changes to the combination **75** and removal of the lockbox **10**.

(2) In a variant of the invention, as illustrated in **Figures 3** and **4**, the body **15** has a top surface **20**, a side surface **25**, an attachment bail **30** and an interior cavity **35**, the interior cavity **35** extends inwardly from an opening **40** in the side surface **25**. The attachment bail **30** extends upwardly from the top surface **20** of the body **15** and is slidable from a first, open position **45** to a second, closed position **50** in which the lockbox **10** is secured to a building fixture.

A first combination lock **100** is provided. The first combination lock **100** is located upon the top surface **20** and secures the bail **30** in the second, closed position **50**. A door **65** is provided. The door **65** is sized and shaped to be removably secured to the opening **40**. A second combination lock **105** is provided. The second combination lock **105** is fitted to the door **65**, controls access to the interior cavity **35** through the opening **40**, and has a combination **110** that is changed through access to a rear panel **80** of the door **65**. A key lock **115** is provided. The key lock **115** controls access to the second combination lock **105**. When the attachment bail **30** is in the first open position **45** it is attached to the building fixture **55** and slid into the second, closed position **50** and then locked in the second, closed position **50** with the first combination lock **100**. The combination **110** of the second combination lock **105** is then set and secured with the key lock **115**. A building key **90** is then inserted in the interior cavity **35** and the door **65** secured to the opening **40** with the second combination lock **105**, thereby permitting access to a building to only those who have been given the combination **110** and preventing changes to the combination **110** and removal of the lockbox **10**.

(3) In yet another variant, as illustrated in **Figures 1-4**, a resilient covering **120** for the body **15** is provided. The covering **120** is located the side surfaces **25** of the body **15** to prevent damage to buildings.

(4) In still another variant, a resilient sleeve **125** for the attachment bail **30** is provided. The sleeve **125** prevents damage to building fixtures.

(5) In a further variant, the first key lock **60** and the second key lock **85** are identically keyed.

(6) In still a further variant, as illustrated in **Figures 3** and **4**, a weatherproof cover **130** is provided. The weatherproof cover **130** is removably secured over the first combination lock **100**.

(7) In another variant of the invention, as illustrated in **Figures 2** and **4**, a chain **135** is provided. The chain **135** attaches the door **65** to the body **15**.

(8) In still another variant, as illustrated in **Figures 1** and **2**, a protruding ledge **140** is provided. The protruding ledge **140** extends outwardly from an edge **145** of the door **65** and is sized and shaped to fit pivotally into an edge **150** of the opening **40**. A sliding latch **155** is provided. The sliding latch **155** is sized, shaped and disposed to removably engage an edge **150** of the opening **40**, and is slidable from a first, disengaged position **160** to a second engaged position **165** for securing the door **65** to the opening **40**. The latch **155** is releasably locked in the engaged position **165** by the combination lock **70**.

(9) In yet another variation, as illustrated in **Figures 3** and **4**, a protruding ledge **140** is provided. The protruding ledge **140** extends from an edge **145** of the door **65** and is sized and shaped to fit pivotally into an edge **150** of the opening **40**. A sliding latch **155** is provided. The sliding latch **155** is sized, shaped and disposed to removably engage an edge **150** of the

opening **40**, and is slidable from a first, disengaged position **160** to a second engaged position **165** for securing the door **65** to the opening **40**. The latch **155** is releasably locked in the engaged position **165** by the second combination lock **105**.

(10) In a further variant, as illustrated in **Figures 1** and **3**, the sliding latch **155** includes a non-slip surface **165**.

(11) In a final variant of the invention, the sliding latch **155** includes a protrusion **165** extending outwardly from the door **65**.

The secure lockbox **10** has been described with reference to particular embodiments. Other modifications and enhancements can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the claims that follow.